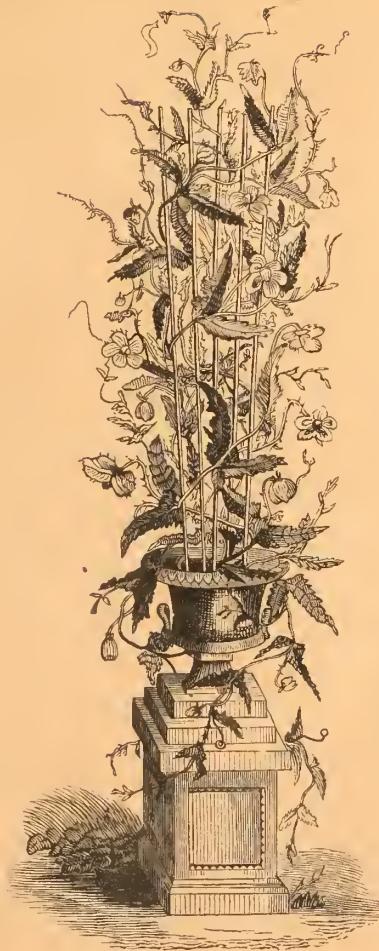
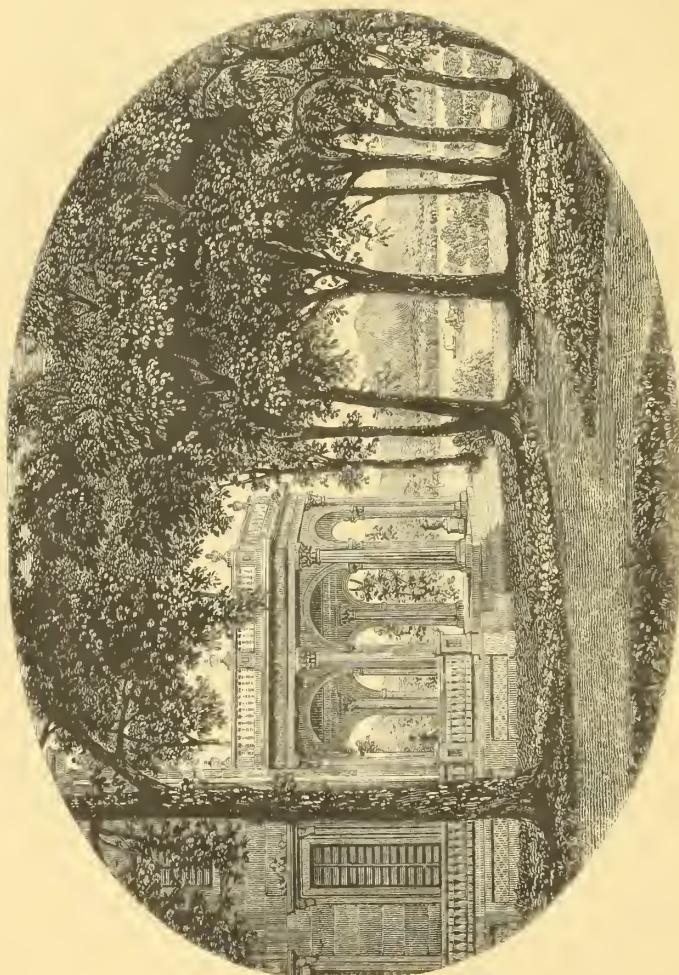




Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/visittomongomer00down>





MONTGOMERY PLACE

A VISIT TO MONTGOMERY PLACE.

THERE are few persons, among what may be called the travelling class, who know the beauty of the finest American country seats. Many are ignorant of the very existence of those rural gems that embroider the landscape here and there, in the older and wealthier parts of the country. Held in the retirement of private life, they are rarely visited, except by those who enjoy the friendship of their possessors. The annual tourist by the railroad and steamboat, who moves through wood and meadow and river and hill, with the celerity of a rocket, and then fancies he knows the country, is in a state of total ignorance of their many attractions; and those whose taste has not led them to seek this species of pleasure, are equally unconscious of the landscape-gardening beauties that are developing themselves every day, with the advancing prosperity of the country.

It has been our good fortune to know a great number of the finest of these delightful residences, to revel in their beauties, and occasionally to chronicle their charms. If we have not sooner spoken at large of MONTGOMERY PLACE, second as it is to no seat in America, for its combination of attractions, it has been rather that we were silent—like a devout gazer at the mar-

vellous beauty of the Apollo—from excess of enjoyment, than from not deeply feeling all its varied mysteries of pleasure-grounds and lawns, wood and water.

MONTGOMERY PLACE is one of the superb old seats belonging to the LIVINGSTON family, and situated in that part of Dutchess county bordering on the Hudson. About one hundred miles from New-York, the swift river steamers reach this part of the river in six hours; and the guest, who leaves the noisy din of the town in the early morning, finds himself, at a little past noon, plunged amid all the seclusion and quiet of its leafy groves.

And this *accessible* perfect seclusion is, perhaps, one of the most captivating features in the life of the country gentleman, whose lot is cast on this part of the Hudson. For twenty miles here, on the eastern shore, the banks are nearly a continuous succession of fine seats. The landings are by no means towns, or large villages, with the busy air of trade, but quiet stopping places, serving the convenience of the neighboring residents. Surrounded by extensive pleasure grounds, fine woods or parks, even the adjoining estates are often concealed from that part of the grounds around the house, and but for the broad Hudson, which forms

the grand feature in all these varied landscapes—the Hudson always so full of life in its numberless bright sails and steamers—one might fancy himself a thousand miles from all crowded and busy haunts of men.

Around MONTGOMERY PLACE, indeed, this air of quiet and seclusion lurks more bewitchingly than in any other seat whose hospitality we have enjoyed. Whether the charm lies in the deep and mysterious wood, full of the echo of water spirits, that forms the northern boundary, or whether it grows out of a profound feeling of completeness and perfection in foregrounds of old trees, and distances of calm serene mountains, we have not been able to divine; but certain it is that there is a spell in the very air, which is fatal to the energies of a great speculation. It is not, we are sure, the spot for a man to plan campaigns of conquest, and we doubt even whether the scholar, whose ambition it is

“ To scorn delights,
And live laborious days,”

would not find something in the air of this demesne, so soothing as to dampen the fire of his great purposes, and dispose him to believe that there is more dignity in repose, than merit in action.

There is not wanting something of the charm of historical association here. The estate derives its name from GEN. MONTGOMERY, the hero and martyr of Quebec, (whose portrait, among other fine family pictures, adorns the walls of the mansion.) MRS. MONTGOMERY, after his lamented death on the heights of Abraham, resided here during the remainder of her life. At her death, she bequeathed it to her brother, the Hon. EDWARD LIVINGSTON, our late minister to France. Here this distinguished diplomatist and jurist passed, in elegant retirement, the leisure intervals of a life largely devoted to the service of the state,

and here still reside his family, whose greatest pleasure seems to be to add, if possible, every year, some admirable improvement, or elicit some new charm of its extraordinary natural beauty.

The age of MONTGOMERY PLACE heightens its interest in no ordinary degree. Its richness of foliage, both in natural wood and planted trees, is one of its marked features. Indeed, so great is the variety and intricacy of scenery, caused by the leafy woods, thickets and bosquets, that one may pass days and even weeks here, and not thoroughly explore all its fine points—

“ Milles arbres, de ces lieux ondoyante parure,
Charme de l'odorat, de gout et des regards,
Elégamment groupés, négligemment épars,
Se fuyaient, s'approchaient, quelquefois à la vue
Ouvraient dans la lointain un scène imprévue ;
Ou, tombant jusqu'à terre, et recourbant leurs bras
Venaient d'un doux obstacle embarrasser leurs
pas ;

Ou pendaient sur leur tête en festons de verdure,
Et de fleurs, en passant, semaient leur chevelure.
Dirai-je ces forêts d'arbustes, d'arbrisseaux,
Entrelaçant en vóûte, en aleove, en berecaux,
Leurs bras voluptueux, et leurs tiges fleuries ?”

About four hundred acres comprise the estate called MONTGOMERY PLACE, a very large part of which is devoted to pleasure grounds and ornamental purposes. The ever varied surface affords the finest scope for the numerous roads, drives, and walks, with which it abounds. Even its natural boundaries are admirable. On the west is the Hudson, broken by islands into an outline unusually varied and picturesque. On the north, it is separated from BLITHEWOOD, the adjoining seat, by a wooded valley, in the depths of which runs a broad stream, rich in waterfalls. On the south is a rich oak wood, in the centre of which is a private drive. On the east it touches the post road. Here is the entrance gate, and from it leads a long and stately avenue of trees, like the approach to an old French chateau. Half-



THE CATARACT.

way up its length, the lines of planted trees give place to a tall wood, and this again is succeeded by the lawn, which opens in all its stately dignity, with increased effect, after the deeper shadows of this vestibule-like wood. The eye is now caught at once by the fine specimens of Hemlock, Lime, Ash and Fir, whose proud heads and large trunks form the finest possible accessories to a large and spacious mansion, which is one of the best specimens of our manor houses. Built many years ago, in the most substantial manner, the edifice has been retouched and somewhat enlarged within a few years, and is at present both commodious, and architectural in character.

Without going into any details of the interior, we may call attention to the unique effect of the *pavilion*, thirty feet wide, which forms the north wing of this house. It opens from the library and drawing-room by low windows. Its ribbed roof is supported by a tasteful series of columns and arches, in the style of an Italian arcade. As it is on the north side of the dwelling, its position is always cool in summer; and this coolness is still farther increased by the abundant shade of tall old trees, whose heads cast a pleasant gloom, while their tall trunks allow the eye to feast on the rich landscape spread around it. (See *Frontispiece.*)

To attempt to describe the scenery, which bewitches the eye, as it wanders over the wide expanse to the west from this pavilion, would be but an idle effort to make words express what even the pencil of the painter often fails to copy. As a foreground, imagine a large lawn waving in undulations of soft verdure, varied with fine groups, and margined with rich belts of foliage. Its base is washed by the river, which is here a broad sheet of water lying like a long lake beneath the eye. Wooded banks stretch along its margin. Its bosom is

studded with islands, which are set like emeralds on its pale blue bosom. On the opposite shores, more than a mile distant, is seen a rich mingling of woods and corn-fields. But the crowning glory of the landscape is the background of mountains. The Kaatskills, as seen from this part of the Hudson, are, it seems to us, more beautiful than any mountain scenery in the middle States. It is not merely that their outline is bold, and that the summit of Roundtop, rising 3000 feet above the surrounding country, gives an air of more grandeur than is usually seen, even in the Highlands; but it is the *colour* which renders the Kaatskills so captivating a feature in the landscape here. Never harsh or cold, like some of our finest hills, nature seems to delight in casting a veil of the softest azure over these mountains—immortalized by the historian of *Rip Van Winkle*. Morning and noon, the shade only varies from softer to deeper blue. But the hour of sunset is the magical time for the fantasies of the colour-genii of these mountains. Seen at this period, from the terrace or the pavilion of MONTGOMERY PLACE, the eye is filled with wonder at the various dyes that bathe the receding hills—the most distant of which are twenty or thirty miles away. Azure, purple, violet, pale grayish-lilac, and the dim hazy hue of the most distant cloud-drift, are all seen, distinct, yet blending magically into each other in these receding hills. It is a spectacle of rare beauty, and he who loves tones of colour, soft and dreamy as one of the mystical airs of a German maestro, should see the sunset fade into twilight from the seats on this part of the Hudson.

THE MORNING WALK.

Leaving the terrace on the western front, the steps of the visitor, exploring MONTGOMERY PLACE, are naturally directed towards

the river bank. A path on the left of the broad lawn leads one to the fanciful rustic-gabled seat, among a growth of locusts at the bottom of the slope. Here commences a long walk, which is the favorite morning ramble of guests. Deeply shaded, winding along the thickly wooded bank, with the refreshing sound of the tide-waves gently dashing against the rocky shores below, or expending themselves on the beach of gray gravel, it curves along the bank for a great distance. Sometimes overhanging cliffs, crested with pines, frown darkly over it; sometimes thick tufts of fern and mossy-carpeted rocks border it, while at various points, vistas or long reaches of the beautiful river scenery burst upon the eye. Half-way along this morning ramble, a rustic seat, placed on a bold little plateau, at the base of a large tree, eighty feet above the water, and fenced about with a rustic barrier, invites you to linger and gaze at the fascinating river landscape here presented. It embraces the distant mountains, a sylvan foreground, and the broad river stretching away for miles, sprinkled with white sails. The *coup-d'œil* is heightened by its being seen through a dark framework of thick leaves and branches, which open here just sufficiently to show as much as the eye can enjoy or revel in, without change of position.

A little farther on, we reach a flight of rocky steps, leading up to the border of the lawn. At the top of these is a rustic seat with a thatched canopy, curiously built round the trunk of an aged pine.

Passing these steps, the morning walk begins to descend more rapidly toward the river. At the distance of some hundred yards, we find ourselves on the river shore, and on a pretty jutting point of land stands a little *rustic pavilion*, from which a much lower and wider view of the landscape is

again enjoyed. Here you find a boat ready for an excursion, if the spirit leads you to reverse the scenery, and behold the leafy banks from the water.

THE WILDERNESS.

Leaving the morning walk, we enter at once into "The Wilderness." This is a large and long wooded valley. It is broad, and much varied in surface, swelling into deep ravines, and spreading into wide hollows. In its lowest depths runs a large stream of water, that has, in portions, all the volume and swiftness of a mountain torrent. But the peculiarity of "The Wilderness," is in the depth and massiveness of its foliage. It is covered with the native growth of trees, thick, dark and shadowy, so that once plunged in its recesses, you can easily imagine yourself in the depths of an old forest, far away from the haunts of civilization. Here and there, rich thickets of the Kalmia or native Laurel clothe the surface of the ground, and form the richest underwood.

But the Wilderness is by no means savage in the aspect of its beauty; on the contrary, here as elsewhere in this demesne, are evidences, in every improvement, of a fine appreciation of the natural charms of the locality. The whole of this richly wooded valley is threaded with walks, ingeniously and naturally conducted so as to penetrate to all the most interesting points; while a great variety of rustic seats, formed beneath the trees, in deep secluded thickets, by the side of the swift rushing stream, or on some inviting eminence, enables one fully to enjoy them.

There are a couple of miles of these walks, and from the depth and thickness of the wood, and the varied surface of the ground, their intricacy is such that only the family, or those very familiar with their course, are at all able to follow them all with



Rustic Seat

any thing like positive certainty as to their destination. Though we have threaded them several seasons, yet our late visit to Montgomery Place found us giving ourselves up to the pleasing perplexity of choosing one at random, and trusting to a lucky guess to bring us out of the wood at the desired point.

Not long after leaving the *rustic pavilion*, on descending by one of the paths that diverges to the left, we reach a charming little covered resting place, in the form of a rustic porch. The roof is prettily thatched with thick green moss. Nestling under a dark canopy of evergreens in the shelter of a rocky fern-covered bank, an hour or two may be whiled away within it, almost unconscious of the passage of time.

THE CATARACT.

But the stranger who enters the depths of this dusky wood by this route, is not long inclined to remain here. His imagination is excited by the not very distant sound of waterfalls.

"Above, below, aerial murmurs swell,
From hanging wood, brown heath and bushy dell;
A thousand gushing rills that shun the light,
Stealing like music on the ear of night."

He takes another path, passes by an airy looking rustic bridge, and plunging for a moment into the thicket, emerges again in full view of the first cataract. Coming from the solemn depths of the wood, he is astonished at the noise and volume of the stream, which here rushes in wild foam and confusion over a rocky fall, forty feet in depth. Ascending a flight of steps made in the precipitous banks of the stream, we have another view, which is scarcely less spirited and picturesque.

This waterfall, beautiful at all seasons, would alone be considered a sufficient attraction to give notoriety to a rural locality in most country neighborhoods. But as if nature had intended to lavish her gifts here, she has, in the course of this valley, given two other cataracts. These are all striking enough to be worthy of the pencil of the artist, and they make this valley a feast of wonders to the lovers of the picturesque.

There is a secret charm which binds us to these haunts of the water spirits. The spot is filled with the music of the falling water. Its echoes pervade the air, and beget a kind of dreamy reverie. The memory of the world's toil gradually becomes fainter and fainter, under the spell of the soothing monotone; until at last one begins to doubt the existence of towns and cities, full of busy fellow beings, and to fancy the true happiness of life lies in a more simple existence, where man, the dreamy silence of thick forests, the lulling tones of babbling brooks, and the whole heart of nature, make one sensation, full of quiet harmony and joy.

THE LAKE.

That shadowy path, that steals away so enticingly from the neighborhood of the cataract, leads to a spot of equal, though a different kind of loveliness. Leaving the



The Lake.

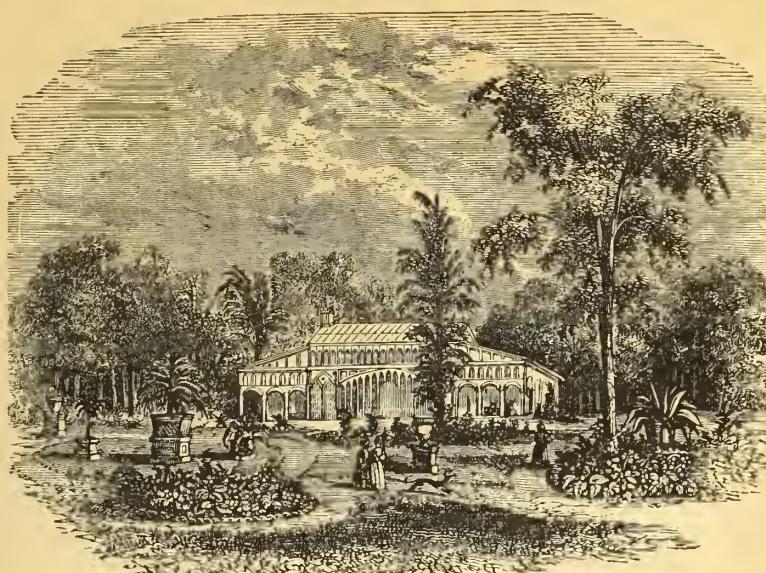
border of the stream, and following it past one or two distracting points, where other paths, starting out at various angles, seem provokingly to tempt one away from the neighborhood of the water, we suddenly behold, with a feeling of delight, **THE LAKE.**

Nothing can have a more charming effect than this natural mirror in the bosom of the valley. It is a fine expansion of the same stream, which farther down forms the large cataract. Here it sleeps, as lazily and glassily as if quite incapable of aught but reflecting the beauty of the blue sky, and the snowy clouds, that float over it. On two sides, it is overhung and deeply shaded by the bowery thickets of the surrounding wilderness; on the third is a peninsula, fringed with the graceful willow, and rendered more attractive by a *rustic temple*; while the fourth side is more sunny and open, and permits a peep at the distant azure mountain tops.

This part of the grounds is seen to the most advantage, either toward evening, or in moonlight. Then, the effect of contrast in light and shadow is most striking, and the seclusion and beauty of the spot are

more fully enjoyed than at any other hour. Then you will most certainly be tempted to leave the curious rustic seat, with its roof wrapped round with a rude entablature like Pluto's crown; and you will take a seat in *Psyche's boat*, on whose prow is poised a giant butterfly, that looks so mysteriously down into the depths below as to impress you with a belief that it is the metempsychosis of the spirit of the place, guarding against all unhallowed violation of its purity and solitude.

The peninsula, on the north of the lake, is carpeted with the dry leaves of the thick cedars that cover it, and form so umbrageous a resting place that the sky over it, seems absolutely dusky at noon day. On its northern bank is a rude sofa, formed entirely of stone. Here you linger again, to wonder afresh at the novelty and beauty of the *second cascade*. The stream here emerges from a dark thicket, falls about twenty feet, and then rushes away on the side of the peninsula opposite the lake. Although only separated by a short walk and the mass of cedars on the promontory, from the lake itself, yet one cannot be seen from the other; and the lake, so full of the very spirit of

*The Conservatory.*

repose, is a perfect opposite to this foaming, noisy little waterfall.

Farther up the stream, is another cascade, but leaving that for the present, let us now select a path leading, as near as we can judge, in the direction of the open pleasure grounds near the house. Winding along the sides of the valley, and stretching for a good distance across its broadest part, all the while so deeply immersed, however, in its umbrageous shelter, as scarcely to see the sun, or indeed to feel very certain of our whereabouts, we emerge in the neighborhood of the CONSERVATORY.

This is a large, isolated, glazed structure, designed by Mr. CATHERWOOD, to add to the scenic effect of the pleasure grounds. On its northern side are, in summer, arranged the more delicate green-house plants; and in front are groups of large Oranges, Lemons, Citrons, Cape Jasmynes, Eugenias, etc., in tubs—plants remarkable for their size and beauty. Passing under neat and tasteful archways of wirework,

covered with rare climbers, we enter what is properly

THE FLOWER GARDEN.

How different a scene from the deep sequestered shadows of the Wilderness! Here all is gay and smiling. Bright parterres of brilliant flowers bask in the full daylight, and rich masses of colour seem to revel in the sunshine. The walks are fancifully laid out, so as to form a tasteful whole; the beds are surrounded by low edgings of turf or box, and the whole looks like some rich oriental pattern or carpet of embroidery. In the centre of the garden stands a large vase of the Warwick pattern; others occupy the centres of parterres in the midst of its two main divisions, and at either end is a fanciful light summer-house, or pavilion, of Moresque character. The whole garden is surrounded and shut out from the lawn, by a belt of shrubbery, and above and behind this, rises, like a noble framework, the background of trees of the lawn and the Wil-

derness. If there is any prettier flower-garden scene than this *ensemble* in the country, we have not yet had the good fortune to behold it.

It must be an industrious sight-seer who could accomplish more than we have here indicated of the beauties of this residence, in a day. Indeed there is enough of exercise for the body, and enjoyment for the senses in it, for a week. But another morning may be most agreeably passed in a portion of the estate quite apart from that which has met the eye from any point yet examined. This is

THE DRIVE.

On the southern boundary is an oak wood of about fifty acres. It is totally different in character from the Wilderness on the north, and is a nearly level or slightly undulating surface, well covered with fine Oak, Chestnut, and other timber trees. Through it is laid out the DRIVE; a sylvan route as agreeable for exercise in the carriage, or on horseback, as the "Wilderness," or the "Morning Walk," is for a ramble on foot. It adds no small additional charm to a country place in the eyes of many persons, this secluded and perfectly private drive, entirely within its own limits.

Though MONTGOMERY PLACE itself is old, yet a spirit ever new directs the improvements carried on within it. Among those more

worthy of note, we gladly mention an *arboretum*, just commenced on a fine site in the pleasure grounds, set apart and thoroughly prepared for the purpose. Here a scientific arrangement of all the most beautiful hardy trees and shrubs, will interest the student, who looks upon the vegetable kingdom with a more curious eye than the ordinary observer.

The whole extent of the private roads and walks, within the precincts of MONTGOMERY PLACE, is between *five and six miles*. The remarkable natural beauty which it embraces, has been elicited and heightened everywhere, in a tasteful and judicious manner. There are numberless lessons here for the landscape gardener; there are an hundred points that will delight the artist; there are meditative walks and a thousand suggestive aspects of nature for the poet; and the man of the world, engaged in a feverish pursuit of its gold and its glitter, may here taste something of the beauty and refinement of rural life in its highest aspect, and be able afterwards understandingly to wish that

"One fair asylum from the world *he* knew,
One chosen seat, that charms with various view.
Who boasts of more, (believe the serious strain,)
Sighs for a home, and sighs, alas! in vain.
Thro' each he roves, the tenant of a day,
And with the swallow wings the year away."

ROGERS.

